

## **The Enduring Impact of Combat Exposure on U.S. Men**

Based on a national survey, VISN 1 MIRECC investigators estimate that military combat exposure accounts for over one third of the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD) in U.S. men. While combat exposure is a well known risk factor for PTSD, this study is the first to gage just how strong the effect of combat is on the U.S. population as a whole. Data for this study come from the National Comorbidity Survey, a study of the rates and consequences of specific psychiatric disorders in a nationally representative sample of the U.S. Combat exposure also accounted for an estimated 7% of unemployment, 2% of divorce and 5% of spousal abuse, in addition to its impact on PTSF. These smaller but significant effects of combat exposure are remarkable because they were detected over two decades after the Vietnam War, when most combat exposure took place. The authors, Holly Prigerson, Ph.D., Paul Maciejewski, Ph.D. and Robert Rosenheck, M.D., suggest that the tendency for combat exposed men to physically abuse their wives supports the concept of a "cycle of trauma", in which the victim becomes the victimizer.

The researchers also disconfirmed the widely held belief that Vietnam veterans constitute a significant proportion of substance abusers, using alcohol and drugs in an attempt to forget the horrors to which they were exposed. In fact, combat exposure did not account for a significant fraction of lifetime substance abuse disorders or lifetime depression.

Although the U.S. is not now engaged in war, military actions elsewhere demonstrate that war is a current reality in many parts of the world. This important report shows that even when combat exposure is time-limited, as in U.S. engagements overseas, it generates a long-lasting array of negative consequences with substantial costs to society.